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The English Lakes

AND

Other Poems.

This One



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The English Lakes

and Other Poems.

BY

ALEXANDER MITCHELL,

DALKEITH.

Printed for Private Circulation.

EDINBURGH:

ANDREW ELLIOT, 17 PRINCES STREET.

1888.

*Mrs Barker, Friends.
With the Author's compliments*

THE following Poems were printed and put in private circulation about twenty years ago, and that edition having been long exhausted, the Author provides now a small additional number of copies for presentation to his friends.

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THE ENGLISH LAKES.

A



THE ENGLISH LAKES.



I.

GOOD-BYE, dear scenes of too engrossing toil !
Home, business, garden, books, a short farewell ;
Be native cares confined to native soil,
Nor with ungenial blight our spirits quell.
On speeds the train, by meadow, strath, and dell,
Through vales where Autumn's ripening treasures glow,
O'er trackless moors whose mossy depths repel
All forms of life ; like arrow from the bow,
With bounding hearts we sweep to fairer fields below.

II.

Across the summit, whence diverging rills
Bear their soft tribute down to rival floods ;
These rush the Annan's willowy banks to fill,
Those break in foam 'mid Lanark's ancient woods.
O'er the deep chasm the smoke for ever broods,
While from its boiling fount the spacious Clyde
Sweeps to the western main, whose roughest moods
Serve but to still those River-depths where ride
The wealth of every shore, the gifts of every tide.

III.

Sweet mountain streams appear, by bard unsung,
Which well might wake the minstrel's proudest lyre ;
For oft to vows of love their banks have rung,
Oft have they nursed the patriot's noble fire.
'Mid scenes like these have glow'd, in son and sire,
That life which forms a nation's noblest dower,
When love of truth and scorn of wrong conspire
Their choicest blessings on a land to shower,
To guard the people's rights, to shield the monarch's power.

IV.

The Border-land, how calm the region now !

Not swept by robber-chiefs with ruthless haste,
The ravaged glebe uncheered by spade or plough,
The people savage, and the land a waste.

Now peace hath knit the kingdoms ; order, taste,
Religion, freedom, law, the land adorn ;

Wealth spreads her treasures, art her trophies chaste,
Old feuds are hushed, mute is the bugle-horn,
The hills are white with sheep, the valleys wave with corn.

V.

Mark yon grey tower, with moss and ivy crowned,
Where haughty earls erewhile kept warlike state,
Fit symbol of a yoke that galled and ground

Their hapless country with disastrous weight.
Bowered 'mid ancestral woods, serenely great,

From verdant lawn the modern palace springs,
Whose glittering spires may type the nobler fate
Which, now, patrician birth to chieftain brings,
Raising his mission high o'er that of feudal kings.

VI.

To lead the age in peace, as once in war,
Direct in council as his sires in fight,
Impel and guide improvement's shining car,
Defend the feeble, and maintain the right ;
What higher aims could patriot peer invite ?
What truer glory gild an ancient name ?
Neglected, what avails ancestral might ?
Obeyed, what power may quench the noble flame ?
Or from the honoured chief withhold immortal fame ?

VII.

On speeds the train ; Carlisle, Penrith, are past,
We quit the land of commerce, corn, and steam ;
And through its rocky mountain-gorge, the vast
And varied beauties of fair Cumbria' gleam.
Without these giant ramparts rolls the stream
Of stern and ceaseless toil, but all within
Is pastoral stillness, where the dwellers seem
To breathe a softer air—an air akin,
Perchance, to that which flowed round earth unstained by sin.

VIII.

While all beyond, impetuous traffic pours—
Why sleep these valleys in a peace so still ?
What guards the beauty of the placid shore ?
What seals the silence of the lonely hill ?
Ages ere man appeared, with matchless skill
The great Designer formed his fair abode,
Here piling grandeur to entrance and thrill,
There storing wealth beneath the flowery sod ;
The dower of beauty, then, was Cumbria's gift from God.

IX.

Earth's ancient changes all our fates decide ;
The dwelling moulds the man ; a viewless hand
Up the broad stream impels the exulting tide,
And lo ! what marts of commerce crown the strand !
Deep in the soil some curious eye hath scann'd
Germs of mysterious power, and wide and far
Industrious miners crowd the busy land ;
On countless forges flash the shining bar,
To bless our homes in peace, to guard our shores in war.

X.

No tidal waters pierce these green retreats,
No priceless strata tempt plutonic skill,
No pomp of pastoral wealth the tourist greets,
No ample sheaves the reaper's bosom fill.
Links of inexorable strength must still
Bind the poor dalesman to a barren dower,
Though lured by charms of mountain, lake, and rill,
In endless train enraptured pilgrims pour,
And bright from leafy nook peeps many a princely bower.

XI.

Queen of the English lakes, sweet Windermere,
Engirt with regal pomp of wood and rock,
From this green height we bless thee, winding clear,
And crowned with charms that courtly splendour mock.
Long by thy shores may pilgrim bards invoke
Those muses who procured thee deathless fame,
What time from haunts of pine, or spreading oak,
To bless thy glorious minstrel-sons they came,
Touching their earthly lips with sparks of heavenly flame.

XII.

'Tis evening, let us trim our fairy shell,
And o'er the lake's calm bosom slowly glide.
How pure the liquid mirror ! cliff and dell
Bloom in inverted beauty 'neath the tide.
Above, what verdure clothes the mountain side !
Undimmed the leafy umbrage shines below ;
That lovely isle, with all its Summer pride,
Shoots down to nether skies its peerless glow ;
And barks above, beneath, in mirror'd cadence row.

XIII.

Elleray, to thy green bowers we fondly turn,
Reared by thy bard and ours in sylvan taste ;
By his imperial step thy paths were worn,
By his majestic port thy halls were graced.
Low lies the minstrel now ; but undefaced
And bright his image glows on lake and sod,
Flash followed flash, and vision chased
O'er Wilson's noble brow, and where he trod
The solid pathway shook as pressed by demigod.

XIV.

Rayrigg, the English Ferney,² but renowned
For other lore than wit of scoffing sage ;
Here Wilberforce in loved seclusion found
Repose from toil, and strength anew to wage
That war with giant wrong that crowned his age
With deathless laurel, when from every sea
He swept the blood-stained slaver, glad presage
Of wider, nobler triumphs yet to be,
When every bond shall burst, and every slave be free.

XV.

Storr's Hall,³ still fair as when beneath thy dome
Sat Canning, Wordsworth, Wilson, Southey, Scott,
Filling with sudden glory the lake-home
Of thy accomplished lord ; whose generous thought
Much-needed rest to the great statesman brought,
And flushed the quiet valley, lake, and bower,
With courtly grace, and light from genius caught,
And radiant glee, and wit of matchless power,
Streaming o'er grove and glade in bright Elysian shower.

XVI.

To Furness Abbey next ;† how vast the change !
Man's perished pomp for Nature's living bloom ;
Shaft, altar, turret, arch, in shattered range,
Erewhile ambition's palace, now its tomb.
The courtly abbot here found ample room
For cowl and sceptre, crucifix and sword ;
For monks to slumber in congenial gloom,
For mailed bands to guard their mitred lord,
And pale-eyed priests who still o'er wasting vellum pored.

XVII.

Fallen is the Abbey now, its glories fled,
The courts unroofed, and quenched the beacon's blaze ;
No echoing arch returns the warrior's tread,
No aisle resounds with penitence, or praise.
The crumbling towers that court our eager gaze
Are of another world ; the hollow shrine
Of abdicated empire ; none shall raise
Those prostrate columns, or their power entwine
With the world's future march, mysterious and divine.

XVIII.

The abbey moulders, but oblivion falls
With speedier darkness on the abbot's fame,
His only witness now, these ruin'd walls,
The vain memorials of a vanished name.
Not such the meed which worth and wisdom claim
Not such the quenchless light by genius shed ;
No sculptured pile may guard the mystic flame
Which lives and glows from secret fountains fed,
And still o'er sea and land its brightening glories spread.

XIX.

Contending cities claimed a poet's birth,
They live but in the bard's immortal tongue ;
No fame to Homer graced Hellenic earth,
But Hellas lives because her minstrel sung.
Think you the dirge of Wallace would have rung
But for yon tower on Stirling's rocky steep ?
His monument is Scotland ; old and young
Guard the loved fabric which he laid so deep,
And in their heart of hearts the founder's image keep.

XX.

By Grasmere's lowly church a poet sleeps,
His monument, a square of humble slate,
With *Wordsworth's* name inscribed ; the tourist weeps
That dust so dear should meet a peasant's fate,
And mix with peasant's ashes ; vain regret !
Not statued splendour fame to genius brings,
Not dust of darkness quells her course elate,
From lordly sculpture she averts her wings,
And on the minstrel's turf unfading glory flings.

XXI.

The bard who wisdom weds with noble words
Acquires an empire o'er all future time ;
Shapes the world's after life ; awakens chords
That thrill through every heart in every clime.
Such empire Wordsworth holds ; his lofty rhyme
Is felt, like sceptred might, in hut and hall,
A monarch's symbol, which, with power sublime,
Far-sundered realms to love and duty call,
And fills with kindred joy the hearts and homes of all.

XXII.

He that would walk with Wordsworth must abjure
All gross companionships, all pleasures mean ;
Enslaved by wealth, or stained by joys impure,
Our feet should stumble on those heights serene.
Of that clear mount no eye may bear the sheen
Till purged from earthly soil ; no untaught ear
Catch the still raptures of the mystic scene,
Where meditative thought and fancy clear
Enwreath the ethereal bowers with laurels never sere.

XXIII.

The mine has many servants, some who sing
Of love, of war, of commerce, and of art ;
'Twas Wordsworth's joy on all that lives to fling
The lustre of a large and loving heart.
To him the common earth and air impart
Unmingled transport and perpetual bloom ;
Wealth has no charms, nor traffic's crowded mart,
But Nature's humblest forms his soul illumine,
And lift his heart to heaven in grandeur or in gloom.

XXIV.

Unbidden tears the tourist's eye suffuse
When shown the illustrious Arnold's loved retreat,
Though now the twentieth summer lends its hues
To veil the grief which shrouds his widowed seat.
In one green vale Fox-How and Rydal meet,⁵
The types of living work and lofty thought ;
Here Christian hero breathed from noonday heat,
There rapt recluse celestial visions caught,
The glorious end the same which sage and minstrel sought.

XXV.

Arnold the wise, the chivalrous, the just,
Who bold research with humble faith combined,
Undaunted liberty with lowly trust,
Meek Christian grace with lofty regal mind.
No lapse of years the laurels shall unbind
Which wreath his honoured brow ; no dearer name
Brightening these favoured vales shall tourist find,
No life of sterner toil, or loftier aim,
Or richer, rarer fruit his country's love may claim.

XXVI

The vale is northward : here, on Dunmail height,⁶
 Sleeps Cumbria's latest king, 'neath battle cairn ;
 There Thirlmere's gleaming waters greet the sight,
 By herons haunted, bright with heath and fern ;
 While round the narrow vale, majestic, stern,
 Encircling mountains pierce the upper air,
 In whose lone peaks, erewhile, the royal ern
 Built her grim eyrie, and with savage care
 Led forth her clamorous brood the quivering spoils to tear.

XXVII.

St John's sweet vale, with lapse of murmuring streams,
 And ever varying charms, the soul's entrance ;
 Till, seen from far, the plain of Derwent gleams
 In hazy light, and measureless expanse.
 Around its marge what giant peaks advance !
 Not thus, like sceptred king, great Skiddaw towers,
 Whose cloud-crowned heights attract our eager glance,
 And wake the purpose, when no conquest lowers
 To climb his airy throne, and view his subject powers.

XXVIII.

'Tis morn,—thick vapours veil the monarch's breast,
But these are slowly rising, and our guide
Predicts a cloudless day ; our steeds are drest ;
We mount ; and village street and mountain side
Ring with their frolic speed ; with conscious pride
We quit the lowly plain, whose ample bounds
Diminish as we rise ; while far and wide
Stretch Skiddaw's upward slopes, whose higher mounds
A drizzling, driving mist with deepening gloom surrounds.

XXIX.

We tread the summit, but in vain we toil
To pierce the encircling cloud with straining eye,
Through the vexed air tumultuous vapours boil,
Earth has no bloom, no brightness has the sky.
Shall we descend ? Hope whispers, Change is nigh ;
Faint gleams of sunlight streak the plain, and lo !
The gorgeous veil ascending floats on high !
From cliff and chasm the obscuring shadows flow,
And earth and ocean smile in noon's unclouded glow.

B

XXX.

'The grandeur of the scene, what pen may trace !
The sea of mountain-tops which spreads afar,
'The pastoral dales, the forest's sylvan grace,
The gleam of lake, and cataract, and scaur.
Carlisle and Cheviot famed in Border war,
Majestic Snowdon, Criffel's lofty dome,
'The far-seen smoke of traffic's crowded car,
'The blue o'er-arching sky, the shining foam
Of the dear waves that guard our beauteous island home.

XXXI.

Descending, let us seek those classic bowers
By genius hallowed, dear to lettered fame,
Where Coleridge first disclosed his matchless powers,
Where Southey slowly nursed his steadier flame,
Gave to his country's lore an honoured name,
And shed on Greta Hall, throughout all time,
A lustre to which regal pomp is tame,
Not caught from earthly fire to blazon crime,
But lit by torch from heaven, unperishing, sublime.

XXXII.

Nor pass unmarked those rude unsculptured blocks,
Which tell of creed outworn and vanished race ;
The Druid's language lives in streams and rocks,⁷
Of Druid's faith survives this single trace.
Within that stone-girt summit's narrow space
The darkling pagan strove, with fruitless fear,
To solve the eternal problem—sin and grace ;
From smoking altars came no inward cheer,
And o'er his baffled toil we drop the pensive tear.

XXXIII.

Rejoicing that such altars smoke no more,
Nor rites unholy stain these Cumbrian hills ;
That o'er our favour'd land from shore to shore,
A worthier worship worthier temples fills,
And humble hearts with purer rapture thrills.
The unconscious quest of heathendom is met ;
Descending Truth the world's long yearning stills ;
The day-star rises ne'er again to set ;
The desert blooms apace ; man shall be happy yet.

XXXIV.

Again our steeds appear ; the cavalcade
Speeds swiftly on by Derwent's shining waves ;
Lodore's loud cataracts eye and ear invade,
And Borrowdale our awe and wonder craves ;
How deep the chasm in which that torrent raves !
How bare and brown that mountain's rugged brow !
With many a pause we tread its rocky caves,
Now on the topmost peaks we stand, and now
By zigzag shingly path our downward journey plough.

XXXV.

Wast-Water claims our evening hours ; the boat
Slides from its simple mooring, and along
The deep and solemn lake we calmly float,
Round which majestic mountains closely throng :
Nearer from the brink the world-famed Screes prolong
Their upward sweep precipitous ; behind
Rises proud Scawfell, dear to Cumbrian song,
As prince of English mountains : round him wind
A crowd of courtier peaks, for kingly state assigned.

XXXVI.

Ply the oar gently, while with quiet bound,
Like hawk from hand, the insidious *otter* springs,
On steady keel, self-poised, careering round,
True to each pause or plunge the shallop brings,
One impulse ruling both ; the fisher flings
From line to lake a trail of glittering flies,
To which the eager trout unthinking clings ;
The line is drawn and shot till daylight dies,
And sends the tourists home to enjoy their speckled prize.

XXXVII.

We quit our rustic inn at early morn,'
For one day more of strenuous Alpine toil,
Up Mosedale's flinty footpath slowly borne,
Where Liza's gleaming cataracts leap and boil.
Our hardy steeds from farther heights recoil ;
We climb to Gatesgarth, and a sudden scream
Reveals our rapture, as beneath us coil
In mazy verdure veil'd, a lovely stream,
And far-extending lake, bright with the noonday beam.

XXXVIII.

Then on to Buttermere, and down the vale
Where Crummock's ampler waves serenely sleep,
Glassing in liquid beauty hill and dale,
Rocks fringed with fern, and pastures gay with sheep.
O'er blossom'd corn-fields health and fragrance creep,
The air resounds with hum of insect wings,
From sun-bright stream the trouts impetuous leap ;
O'er his loved mate the lark exulting springs,
And, circling slowly heavenward, soars and sings.

XXXIX.

To Keswick with the fall of eve ; and here
Our epic closes, though we longer clung
To Derwent Vale ; and many a tarn and mere,
And wood and waterfall remain unsung.
With fond yet faltering hand these notes are rung
To express, perhaps prolong, the pure delight
Which thrill'd our hearts as Cumbria's beauties sprung
In long and loved succession on our sight,—
Though all unfit the harp to sing such charms aright.

XL.

'Twas sweet from toil's exhausting cares to fly
To scenes like these, by silent grandeur crown'd ,
Breathe the free air of nature ; and descry
Heaven's radiant image stamped on all around.
'Mid smoke of cities man alone is found ;
The mountain summit lifts us nearer God,
Unveils His hand who lights yon azure round,
With forms of grace and beauty gems the sod,
And pours the exhaustless wealth of ocean far abroad.

July, 1862.





NOTES.



1. FAIR CUMBRIA, page 6.

It is proper to explain, that the term "Cumbria" is applied here, and in subsequent stanzas, to the Lake district generally, and not as intimating that the places referred to are in the county of Cumberland. The Lake district embraces part of three counties—Lancashire, Cumberland, and Westmoreland; and some of the most celebrated of the lakes, including those we first visited, are in the latter county.

2. RAYRIGG, THE ENGLISH FERNEY, page 10.

"Ferne," on the Lake of Geneva, was the well-known residence of Voltaire; and tourists have traced a resemblance between that celebrated mansion and the Westmoreland home of William Wilberforce.

3. STORR'S HALL, page 10,

On the eastern margin of Lake Windermere, was, at the time referred to, the residence of John Bolton, Esq., an English merchant, the architect of his own fortune, and distinguished for wealth, hospitality, and cultivated taste.

In Lockhart's *Life of Sir Walter Scott* there is a very graphic account of a party at Storr's Hall, comprising all the distinguished individuals named in the text ; and of a regatta on the lake, over which Professor Wilson, "the Admiral of the Lake," as Canning called him, presided.

4. FURNESS ABBEY, page 11,

Is about fourteen miles from the foot of Windermere, and a visit to the ruins forms one of the most interesting of the excursions from that lake. The Abbey was founded and richly endowed by King Stephen in 1127 ; and the power and authority of the abbots were very extensive. They kept up a considerable military establishment, and on that account were frequently applied to by the neighbouring proprietors for defence against their enemies. "It is strange," says Miss Martineau, "to see the railway traversing those woods where these gray-robed foreigners used to pass hither and thither on their holy errands. A beacon once belonged to the Abbey, a watch-tower on an eminence, accessible from its walls, and whose signal-fire was visible all over Low Furness."

5. FOX-HOW AND RYDAL, page 15,

The former having been the residence of Thomas Arnold, and the latter of William Wordsworth.

6. DUNMAIL HEIGHT, page 16,

Or more correctly "Dunmail Raise," forms here the boundary between Westmoreland and Cumberland ; and under a large heap of stones at the

summit lies the body of the last Cumberland king, Dunmail, who was slain in battle in 945 by Edmund, the Saxon king.

7. THE DRUID'S LANGUAGE LIVES IN STREAMS AND ROCKS,
page 19.

The allusion is to the well-known fact that the names still borne by our principal rivers and mountains are those which the ancient British inhabitants of the country gave them, and by which their language is so far preserved. The Celtic tribes have passed away, without leaving any literary remains, or any other architectural memorials than those unhewn upright stones which are still to be found, singly or in groups, scattered over the land. Of these groups, or Druidical circles, as they are called, that of Keswick is one of the most perfect.



THE MONTHS.



THE MONTHS.



January.

I.

JANUS, the opener,¹ now 'mid cloud and storm
Unlocks the portals of the infant year,
With one face marks the future's shadowy form,
With one face lingers on the closed career.
Even so, with spirit pensive, not severe,
We greet the shrouded dawn, attempering hope
With memory, on whose mirror, calm and clear,
The forms of vanished hours find vivid scope :
Slow on the pictured past Time's friendly veil we drop.

II.

One milestone more on life's rough path we mark,
Then with unpausing speed the course pursue ;
What eye may catch the goal, remote and dark ?
What heart presage the journey's final hue ?
Fame, fortune, power, with charms for ever new,
Urge the worn pilgrims up the dusty steep,
Love lends its dearer light, its loftier view,
The path of duty sterner pilgrims keep :
Shall not the weary faint ? shall not the wretched weep ?

III.

The festal tide retires, and busy life
Fills its old channels with augmenting flow,
The city rings with traffic's eager strife,
In classic halls the lights of science glow,
And court and camp rekindling lustre show.
Above, rank, fashion, wealth, their pomp display ;
Beneath, pale suffering lurks, and voiceless woe :
Unchanged the old year's social forces play,
Yet stirred by nobler life, and cheered by brightening day.

IV.

Through the arched portal Spring's prelusive ray
Startles to sudden life the sleeping earth,
In the brief noon precocious insects play,
In sheltering nooks we note the snowdrop's birth ;
The tuneful tribes with quaint untimely mirth
Rehearse on leafless boughs faint notes of love,
While on those boughs, 'mid Nature's wintriest dearth,
The swelling bud foretells the leafy grove,
With verdure all around, and brightness all above.

V.

A change ensues ; borne from the icy north
Fermenting tempests swell their cloudy hall,
Till the frail barrier bursts, and issuing forth
On noiseless wing the feathered squadrons fall.
Their thickening ranks the gazer's heart appal,
Their stainless splendour pains his aching sight,
O'er the dull sky they weave a duskier pall,
Yet spread on meadow, moor, and mountain height
With lustre deepening still a robe of living light.

VI.

Another change ; fresh from the genial west
The wind blows softly, bringing gentle rain,
The ice-freed torrent chafes in wild unrest,
Bursts its frail barriers, and invades the plain :
The floods subside, and smiling meads again
Spread their soft verdure to a kindlier sky,
Soft fleecy clouds spread slow o'er land and main,
And mild and mellowing showers a pledge supply
That wintry storms will pass, that vernal hours draw nigh.



February.

I.

THE year's great dial marks the second hour,
And Nature slowly wakes from long repose,
Incipient verdure gleams from brake and bower,
In brake and bower incipient passion glows.
Mark yon old wood² which sister streams enclose,
How the grave rookery screams its jarring loves,
While twig by twig the fragile city grows ;
Unscared by storms that sweep the bending groves,
True to her home of love each brooding mother proves.

C

II.

Spring's gentle heralds troop to meet the sun,
Primrose and daisy grace the verdant sod,
Again the lark her skyey steep hath won,
And sphered in light, pours rapture all abroad ;
The ploughshare softly cleaves the yielding clod,
From the fresh furrow health and fragrance spring ;
Soon from the glebe, by bounteous sower trod,
Shall burst the germs which future plenty bring,
And wood, and vale, and hill with vernal joyance ring.

III.

Still Winter reigns : on Pentland's snowy steep
He marshals and inspires his savage train,
Whence on the tempest's sullen wing they sweep
In fierce and frequent conflict on the plain.
Great issues wait the strife ; but all in vain
The hope to quench the sun's reviving power,
Again the meadow smiles, bright skies again
Invite to rural toil, and stream and bower
Proclaim the growing might of Nature's genial hour.

IV.

Where on the social dial points the sun ?
From wintry torpor do the millions wake ?
Here, too, the glacier melts, though scarce begun
The vernal throes which human fetters break.
With squalid penury, and in gloom opaque
The toiling crowd have long and bravely fought,
With growing gain : each upward step they take
Nerves their free arms for work, their minds for thought,
And thus by toil and truth are life's true guerdons sought.

V.

Nor sought in vain : yet wide on every hand
The chill and gloom of social winter rest ;
Industrial triumphs fill the busy land,
The busy hands that gain them toil unblest.
'Twill not be always thus : at Spring's behest
The icebound soil to genial warmth will yield,
The landscape smile in moral verdure drest,
The heads and hands of toil due knowledge wield,
And all who sow shall reap the golden harvest-field.

VI.

But all must sow ; no sluggard's arm may claim
The swelling sheaves which faithful labour bless ;
Self-raised, with manly step and honest aim,
Up the rough slope must every toiler press.
No social barrier—birth, or rank, or class—
Forbids the upward path to highest power :
From straw-roofed shed, or village green shall pass
The heirs of fame, unconscious of the dower,
To guide and guard the land in danger's darkest hour.

1869.



March.

I.

COME, gentle Spring, with voice of singing birds,
With softening breezes, and with brightening skies ;
Come with thy bleating flocks and lowing herds,
And all the charms earth's secret life supplies :
For lo ! the Winter's past, and Nature sighs
And yearns to be renewed ; beneath thy tread
The slumbering flowers in fragrant ranks shall rise,
A richer verdure steal o'er dell and mead,
And love in flowery bands all living creatures lead.

II.

Behold the sower ! type of vernal bloom,
Of Summer-beauty, and autumnal stores ;
What though that slender seed dissolve in gloom,
To ampler life its quenchless spirit soars :
Swift from the grave the living verdure pours,
With conscious joy the echoing groves resound,
Soft tides of Summer fragrance flood the shores,
Anon the ripening harvest waves around ;
With Autumn's garnered wealth the rolling year is crowned.

III.

Hark ! the faint piteous cry of yeanning lamb,
Forsaken, trembling, on the upland wild !
The orphan wail attracts its woolly dam,
Whose loving bleat recalls her wandering child.
That peril past, of every grief beguiled,
Mark how it leaps and frolics uncontrolled !
While from yon wind-swept clouds, superbly piled,
Light chases shadow o'er the daisied wold,
Touching each silver frill with edge of burnished gold.

IV.

Of the great months which round our mortal year
Guard with chief care life's brief and beauteous Spring,
Shield its young bloom from pleasure's deadly air,
To its soft furrows grace and culture bring ;
So shall fair manhood scale with ample wing
The heights where science plants her eager feet,
Dispel the mists round social strifes that cling,
And guide the march to freedom's shining seat,
And age prolong the race with still increasing heat.

V.

As spring-time wakes to life the sleeping earth,
And nerves for needful toil the peasant's arm,
With spring-time come those tasks where highest worth
Lends to imperial sway its noblest charm.
To Gladstone, Bright, Argyll, each heart must warm
That beats with patriot zeal in freedom's cause ;
Unspoiled by power, unshaken by alarm,
Unawed by strife, undazzled by applause,
With calm and loving hearts they mould their country's laws.

VI.

Success and honour crown their glorious aim
The scars and wrongs of ages to efface,
To pluck from Erin's brow the brand of shame,
And link in love with ours her noble race.³
To the Green Isle Spring comes with added grace,
On her free platform Celt and Saxon stand,
O'er buried strifes to clasp in warm embrace,
Prepared with loyal heart and ready hand
To guard from hostile foot their loved and beauteous land.

1869.



A p r i l.

I.

APRIL, the month of beauty, love, and song,

The joyous nuptial-tide of earth and sky,

From whose prolific couch incessant throng

The bloom and life their spousal rites supply.

How the woods ring with love's own melody !

How the air thrills with hum of insect mirth !

Again the dew-bright meadow charms the eye,

Again the cuckoo hails the Summer's birth,

And love and beauty claim the sov'reignty of earth.

II.

The morning breaks, and, girt with vapoury shroud,
The sun slow rises in the dappled east,
Climbs the blue steep through banks of feathery cloud,
And floods with joy creation's daily feast.
On earth, in air, 'neath ocean's foamy crest,
Unconscious myriads life's free banquet share ;
'Tis man's alone, the interpreter and priest
Of Nature, to adore the heavenly care
Which bids even sin-stained earth perpetual gladness wear.

III.

How soft and gracious is this April rain !
Pattering with muffled feet on leaf and flower,
Glistening like orient pearl on tree and plain,
With richest fragrance scenting dell and bower.
Again the orchard wears its beauteous dower
Of blossomed whiteness, pure as Alpine snow,
While roused from wintry sleep, in sunny hour
From bud to bloom the roving wild bees go,
And thence to mossy cell like arrow from the bow.

IV.

Urged by the genial air and placid sky,
The angler steals round many a willowy nook,
With skilful arm and well dissembled fly
To lure the incautious troutlet from the brook.
Mark how it springs to 'scape the fatal hook,
Till on the grassy bank the struggle ends ;
Emblem of him who, drawn by glozing look,
A credulous ear to painted pleasure lends,
And pierced by vengeful barb her helpless victim bends.

V.

Mark o'er the stream yon shining insect band
Wheeling in airy dance, exulting, brave ;
At noon they flashed to life, along the strand,
Ere night descends to find a common grave.
Strange history theirs ! two years beneath the wave
As wingless grubs they slept in sunless gloom,
Impelled by power unseen, from watery cave
They sprang to perfect life,—their wondrous doom
To quench, when scarce begun, their gambols in the tomb.

VI.

Within that three hours' span, the sparkling fly
Life's mystic end fulfils—in love and light
Its merry moments speed ; without a sigh
It sinks from glowing day to starless night.
Yet on that fragile form Creative might
In peerless skill and lavish wealth appears,
Its gauzy wings bedropt with spangles bright
By Him who shapes for all their earthly spheres,
And in whose sight one day is as a thousand years.

1869.



May.

I.

COME, sprightly May, with bright and joyous eye,
With robe of sunshine, and with breath of flowers,
Bid Spring retire, and Summer's genial sky
Bend soft o'er murmuring streams and vocal bowers.
Hark ! from yon wood the pensive ring-dove pours
Her loving plaint, while on the daisied mead
The blossomed hawthorn sheds its fragrant showers ;
The roving wild bee flits with vagrant speed,
And sleek full-uddered kine in peaceful quiet feed.

II.

Higher and higher climbs the exulting sun,
The dew-bathed earth a deepening verdure shows,
O'er the young corn faint wind-swept billows run,
From brake and bush love's pleasing rapture flows.
And lo ! from climes where ceaseless Summer glows
The swallow comes, impelled by nuptial cares,
In scenes of youthful joy to seek repose ;
'Mid haunts of men her clay-formed couch she rears,
And soon that home of love her callow fledglings bears.

III.

O'er pathless seas, from sultry southern plains,
She comes with weary wing and throbbing breast ;
What unseen hand has forged the mystic chains
That guide the pilgrim to her place of rest ?
What gentle dreams of childhood's loving nest,
Urge the weak wanderer to that nest again,
Touch with soft memories lake and mountain crest,
And link the hopes that flush her busy brain
With homes 'neath cottage eaves by Scotland's stormy main.

IV.

'Tis morn—in silence breaks the purple dawn,
The glory brightens, and the mountains glow,
Though rolling mists o'er stream and valley drawn
Still heave their billowy depths of stainless snow.
With burning disk the sun uptowers, and lo !
Touched by his beams, the cloudy veil is rent ;
In shreds and patches from the dell below
Round cliff and tree the lucent veils are bent,
And down through light and shade Esk's gleaming waves are sent.

V.

Sweet stream, what memories crowd thy narrow vale !
In that long furrow which thy waves have worn
Sheer through the molten rock I read the tale
Of sumless centuries ere our race was born.
Yon crumbling keep, by time and tempest torn,
Frowns o'er thy flood the type of vanished power,
Wealth, culture, art, these modern glades adorn,
Hives of new labour rise round hall and bower,
And widening harvests own and bless the golden shower.

VI.

Mark how o'er splintered rock and wave-worn scaur
Kind Nature gently weaves her mossy shield,
Covers, with pitying hand, each dint of war,
And bids rude rock-work bloom and beauty yield.
Slow winds the Esk round knoll, and lawn, and field,
Its azure banks impearled with morning dew,
Each sylvan path with floating fragrance filled,
And wreathed and starred with flowers of every hue,
While wood and valley ring with music ever new.

1870.



J u n e.

I.

THROUGH six slow moons these northern zones have spun
Sunward and onward round the orb of day ;
Now in the blaze of Summer's sultry noon
Direct and full descends the flaming ray.
The effulgent clouds around the dawn which play,
Dissolve and vanish in the azure deep,
O'er field and forest swarm the bright array
Of insect armies woke from wintry sleep,
In deepening dazzling files their quivering columns sweep.

D

II.

The rolling year has reached that lofty bourne
Where the green slopes of vernal progress end,
Where early hopes to fruit or failure turn,
And whence through gathering shades the months descend.
Now Summer reigns supreme ; the forests bend
Beneath the gorgeous drapery Nature weaves,
Moor, meadow, mount, their blossomed fragrance lend,
And where yon billowy clover swells and heaves,
The rasp of mower's scythe foretells autumnal sheaves.

III.

Chief of earth's leafy children, lowly grass,
What memories cluster round thy modest green !
Thy scented paths round thymy knolls that pass,
Thy pastoral life, thy depths of dewy sheen !
What gentle Summer joys these meads have seen,
Where quiet waters creep through flowers abroad,
Where herds and flocks the ample pastures glean,
And happy feet fall soft on yielding sod ;
What scenes so dear to man, so highly graced of God !

IV.

Nor deem those fleeting tribes beneath thy care
Which Summer suns have woke from sunless gloom,
The dazzling splendour of the robes they wear,
Their curious arts, their toils, their early tomb.
The ingenious wasp 'mid Eden's youthful bloom
Hung its smooth paper dome from bush and bower ;
None marked the process of the living loom,
None caught the secret of its mystic power,
The wasp forestalled in vain Discovery's latest hour.

V.

Yon strawbuilt hive our earnest study claims,
Its arts, its social ranks, its royal state,
The ceaseless labours and co-operant aims
Of the bright throng who round their monarch wait.
The monarch dies ; to fill the royal seat
No subject may aspire ; with conscious power
They mould a princely cell, and princely meat
Provide for peasant occupant ; the hour
Sends forth an insect queen to claim her royal dower.

VI.

Take counsel of the bees : 'tis royal food
Must fit for royal duties : narrow brain
And vulgar nurture may suffice the crowd
Who store the cells which human hives sustain ;
But he who life's true altitudes would gain
In larger mould must shape his young desires,
With eager thirst diviner fountains drain,
Grasp with firm hand the sceptre truth requires,
And brighten tasks of earth with heaven's serener fires.

1870.



July.

I.

REFULGENT Summer broods on flood and field
With light more dazzling, and with fiercer heat,
To sultry suns Time's leafy glories yield,
And famished flocks on thirsty uplands bleat.
But change is near : in dark encounter meet
Yon thunder-clouds, and lo ! 'mid flash and peal,
O'er the broad champaign pours the flowing sheet
The conscious flocks unwonted freedom feel,
And softening vale and hill life's mystic power reveal.

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And softening vale and hill life's mystic power reveal.

II.

Worn with the fret and fume of ceaseless care
In stifling streets, through slow consuming hours,
We pant for ampler skies and purer air,
For mountain solitudes, and shadowy bowers ;
And these our holidays shall bring, the flowers
Will spring elastic from the tourist's tread,
When far behind he leaves the spires and towers
That bound his daily toils, and far ahead
Fair Scotland's woods and streams in all their pomp are spread.

III.

On speeds the train, through "Scotia's darling seat,"
Whose peerless charms no intercourse may stale,
Mark her green hills, the tides which round her beat,
Her castled steep, her wealth of wood and vale :
No street or stone but points its wondrous tale
Of feud, or fire, or brave heroic deed ;
Here martyrs bled, and there with study pale
Undaunted teachers sowed the immortal seed
Which gives Edina still the march of truth to lead.

IV.

Onwards through corn-fields tinged with early gold,
Through fragrant hay-fields breathing soft perfume,
Till Lithgow's crumbling palace, famed of old,
The pensive tourist chills with kindred gloom.
Comes murky Carron next, whose fiery womb
Shoots flame and terror o'er the evening sky,
Yet through that smoky radiance calmly loom
The arts and wealth her earth-born powers supply,
Taste, knowledge, public care, and widening liberty.

V.

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Ran blood when Scotland's bravest deeds were done,
That flagstaff, raised by patriot Scotsmen, shows
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Our painted sires—their history scarce begun—
Saw conquering legions ditch and rampart lay,
And 'gainst Imperial Rome stood savagely at bay.

VI.

Thanks to the Roman, by whose stern control,
And arts, and learning, Scottish culture grew ;
No strength of native limb might win the goal
'Gainst athletes bathed and braced with classic dew.
Till taught by Rome, no British warrior knew
The path by which that martial city rose ;
Now, from a loftier height we calmly view
A wider empire 'neath our Queen repose,
Illumed by tropic suns, and chilled by polar snows.

1870.



August.

I.

The bloom of Summer beauty slowly wanes,
To earlier ocean bed the sun goes down,
Each leafy copse prelusive russet stains,
And whitening harvests hill and valley crown.
No more with sickle armed the simple clown
Fills his broad bosom with autumnal sheaves.
No gleaner now may dare the master's frown,
No gentle Ruth to maiden shelter cleaves,
And with unconscious skill love's straw-wrought chaplet weaves. .

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II.

Still Autumn's mellow light the landscape gilds,
Still the warm air with golden radiance glows,
Though glittering hoar frost gems the morning fields,
And earlier, murkier clouds round evening close.
The tide of insect life no longer flows,
The swallow southward speeds her weary way,
Mark the soft-wingèd seeds, each breeze that blows
Impels o'er vale and hill in fitful play,
To wake from wintry sleep with Spring's returning ray.

III.

The autumnal pause from learning, labour, law,
Still sheds its grateful balm on brain and blood ;
'Mid breezy hills their toilworn votaries draw
Full draughts of joy from Nature's welling flood.
Statesman and student meet by stream and wood,
Scale the same summits, tread the same defiles,
With kindred rapture mark each changing mood
That wreathes old Ocean's face with frowns or smiles,
While in his loving arms he folds our native isles.

IV.

The harvest ends ; our soil no Sabbath knows,⁴
No double stores the sixth year's labour crowns ;
Close on the reaping wheels the ploughshare goes,
The ploughshare's rasp the song of sower drowns.
Deem not this lot severe : the sluggard frowns
That deepening toil should dog enlarging power,
The wiser worker Heaven's great order owns,
With nobler science meets the advancing hour,
And from yet ampler founts sees ampler treasures shower.

V.

Spring, Summer, Autumn : blossom, foliage, fruit,
The august procession of the bounteous year ;
Bud opening into bloom, and, calm and mute,
Soft Summer beauty crowned with chaplets sere.
Not sun and shower alone, but skies severe,
And storm and tempest nursed that garnered grain,
Gave force to slender stalk and bending ear,
Bade milky softness ripening strength attain,
And golden plenty sweep its waves o'er hill and plain.

VI.

Spring, Summer, Autumn : childhood, manhood, age :

In the round year we mark their mirrored state ;

Youth's joyous bloom,—the graver, manlier stage

Of busy life,—and wisdom ripening late.

Learn the great lesson,—with life's earliest date

Sow the good seed, nor let thy willing hand

In growing years the glorious work abate ;

With deepening zeal for truth and virtue stand,

And with diviner life inspire and bless the land.

1870.



October.

I.

OCTOBER, border-land of sun and snow,
Where Summer's loved and lingering empire ends,
Where wintry gales their earliest terrors show,
And 'neath whose sweep the creaking forest bends.
Again the storm is hushed, and Nature lends
A brief autumnal calm to fields and floods,
Again 'mid vocal walls the stream descends,
A silvery haze o'er rock and river broods,
And tints with softer charms the many-coloured woods.

E

II.

Strange beauties o'er the waving woodland steal,
Bright hectic tints that flush the year's decay,
Funereal hues that coming doom reveal,
Yet gild the pomp its touch will rend away.
In the soft breeze the forest banners play,
While leaf by leaf descends the sylvan rain,
Caught by the gale it whirls in quaint array
Along the public path, across the plain,
Or borne on eddy stream to mingle with the main.

III.

So speed the changes of man's chequered year,
His vernal bud, his wealth of summer bloom,
And Autumn's mellowing fruit, till, pale and sere,
He drops, like withered leaf in wintry tomb.
Here ends the likeness : from that narrow room
To ampler life the sleeping dust shall rise,
Its radiant strength undimmed by grief or gloom,
To draw from living founts divine supplies,
Be fed with nobler food, illumed by brighter skies.

IV.

Fair flowers, adieu ! bright children of the sun,
The grace and garland of the circling year,
Your gay career is closed, and sere, and dun,
'Reft of their charms the widowed woods appear.
In vain dandelion, daisy, king-cup rear
Their sickly form to tempt a second Spring.
Spring comes not twice ; nor in man's higher sphere
May wintry age with vernal promise ring,
Or aught but Summer's strength life's moral harvests bring.

V.

The falling leaf ! hope checks the ready tear
Which starts 'mong dappled woods and deepening gloom,
For lo ! beneath each fading leaf uprear
The germs of vernal grace and summer bloom.
Mark in that swelling bud the fruitful womb
Where flower and foliage wait for warmer skies ;
'Tis coming life that speaks the gentle doom,
Unbinds the sylvan draperies' slender ties,
And on each leafless bough bids brighter foliage rise.

VI.

Comes vintage after harvest : shining grapes
And wine and oil the southern season crown ;
His brow with leaves the Gallic peasant drapes,
In wine-stained garments laughs his sorrows down.
But who from Edom comes in blood to drown
The vines and verdure of his beauteous land,
Turn joy to wailing, and with vengeful frown
Dash in the dust its claim to old command ?
God, in these judgments calls to mark his mighty hand.⁵

1870.



November.

I.

NOVEMBER comes, depressing, sad, severe,
With naked fields and low and leaden skies,
No insect hum to greet the listening ear,
No bursting bud to soothe the straining eyes.
Yet still one loved and lingering warbler tries
To chase the sadness of the wintry hour :
How soft the robin's tender notes arise !
As, perched in lowly bush or leafless bower,
He trills to answering love his passion's gentle power.

II.

The wind is up, and loose and lurid clouds
In hurrying grandeur sweep the troubled sky ;
Strained to their roots are bent the groaning woods,
And fast and far the shattered branches fly.
By cottage hearth why heaves the secret sigh ?
To mother's heart the howling tempest brings
Thoughts of her sailor-boy ; in mother's eye
The fated bark in yawning whirlpool swings,
In mother's eager ear the far-off death-knell rings.

III.

The storm is hushed, but from the scowling north
O'er sea and sky thick vapoury clouds ascend,
And spread and darken, till impetuous forth
In one commingling flood their stores descend.
The deluge deepens, field and furrow lend
Their turbid runnels to the reddening tide,
Marsh, meadow, moor, augmenting currents send,
While the broad flood these confluent streams provide
Sweeps o'er its ancient banks in ruin far and wide.

IV.

Again the floods retire, again the stream
Down wooded dell in murmuring music flows ;
Nor flowers nor foliage in its current gleam,
But calm and clear the inverted forest glows.
Bright scarlet haws their grateful tints disclose,
The fresh-ploughed fields of future harvest speak,
Forth to the fragrant glebe the sower goes,
While dusky wings, from rookery bare and bleak,
By Nature's impulse urged the well-strewn furrows seek.

V.

With shortening day life's nobler tasks return,
School, college, class-room heave with conscious might,
Strong emulous fires in youthful bosoms burn,
And the world's future guides emerge to light.
From that low school-form forth to left and right
They pass to want and weakness, wealth and power ;—
To till their native fields ; with bolder flight
Seek homes 'neath other stars ; or proudly tower
Where courts and camps dispense ambition's golden shower.

VI.

With darkening days come nights of social joy,
Round glowing hearths enlarging circles press,
Mirth, converse, song, the merry groups employ,
And life and labour wear their loveliest dress.
Books lend their aid the quiet hour to bless :
O'er midnight oil the eager student pores
On tomes where mightiest minds their stamp impress,
When fired by genius, fancy highest soars
Or star-led science treads Creation's farthest shores.

1870.



December.

I.

THE rolling year its changeful circuit ends,
From vernal dawn to Summer's cloudless noon,
Thence down the shining slope where slowly blends
Autumnal shades with glow of radiant June.
Now while we gaze, beneath the wintry moon
Through leafless woods the rising tempest raves,
A bridge of crystal spans the lake, and soon
His sounding path the skater's steel engraves,
And eager curlers shout above the imprisoned waves.

II.

Soft, silent, ceaseless falls the feathery snow,
Its stainless beauty swathing earth and main ;
Is Nature dead ? beneath funereal show
Beats there no pulse that points to life again ?
The groves are hushed ; no bud on hill or plain
Expands to foliage ; in the murky air
For glance of insect wings we search in vain ;
To haunts of men the forest tribes repair,
And hill and stream and plain death's rigid features wear.

III.

Yet 'tis not death : suppressed but vital still
Life in soft slumber waits the genial hour,
In secret caves, 'neath rocks, by mountain-rill,
In mossy lawn, in rents of crumbling tower,
The torpid myriads rest, till leafy bower
And daisied mead their balmy sweets disclose ;
The great Provider spreads in bud and flower
The vernal feast, and straight from deep repose
On bright and burnished wings the eager army goes.

IV.

'Tis night : from fields of glistening snow we turn,
To the fair orbs that crowd yon azure deep,
How bright 'mid cloudless blue these watch-fires burn !
How calm through skyey depths their course they keep !
Bring forth thy glasses ; with their mighty sweep
Millions of shining worlds arrest thine eyes ;
Look farther, millions more from darkness leap,
Still from the void new suns and systems rise ;
Look farther, millions more blaze from remoter skies.

V.

Yet think not countless worlds, or realms afar,
Exhaust or limit Heaven's all-ruling care,
That Hand which guides the course of sun and star
Gives to the beetle's wings the tints they wear.
Spring's opening bloom, the balm of summer air.
Autumnal plenty, Winter's stormy hour,
Attest His hand who numbers every hair,
Guards every sparrow, and with gracious power
Delights on lowly hearts diviner gifts to shower.

VI.

Ring Christmas bells ! afar the tidings bear
Which thrilled with holy joy in shepherds' ears ;
Ring Christmas bells ! let sage and savage share
The far-brought balm that dries all human tears.
Though least in night's blue arch of shining spheres,
To man's abode has highest grace been given ;
That wondrous BIRTH earth's dreariest desert cheers,
Spreads through its living throngs love's gracious leaven,
Allies the race to God, and binds the earth to Heaven.

1870.





NOTES.

1. Janus, from whom the first month of the year derives its name, is usually represented with a key in his hand, by which he is supposed to open the gateway of the year ; and with two faces, the one looking backward on the past, and the other forward towards the future.

2. The Crow-wood, Dalkeith Park, encircled by the North and South Esks, which unite at the extremity of that sylvan peninsula, of which the rooks have had immemorial possession.

3. The reference is to the Bill then before Parliament for the disestablishment and disendowment of the Established Church of Ireland. (March, 1869.)

4. "In the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the Lord : thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard."—LEVITICUS xxv. 4.

5. The allusion is to the Franco-German War. (October, 1870.)

SONNETS.



SONNETS.

Queen, Lords, and Commons.

I. THE QUEEN.

'TIS with no faltering voice we bid the THRONE
Crown the proud fabric of our triple State,
And to fair hands commit the growing weight
Of empire widening still from zone to zone.
Around that royal seat have calmly grown
Law, order, liberty, heroic deeds ;
Free thought, free speech, free pen, the immortal seeds
Of all true nobleness. Our isle alone
Can boast such glories, and we fondly turn
To that dear throne round which they meekly burn,

And bless its gentle strength and mellowing sheen,
Which grateful calm to loyal millions yields,
In peace directs them, and in danger shields :
With patriot hearts we pray, "God save the Queen."
1867.

II. THE LORDS.

LORDS of the soil, the senate, and the court !
Our annals glow with your ancestral deeds,
From which, unheeded, sprang the undying seeds
Of English freedom. In the last resort
Men claim your judgment still. Your fair report
We prize with jealous and increasing fear,
Lest the patrician names we hold so dear
Should, in the shock of higher strifes, come short.
For not with steel-clad chieftains, as of old,
Must the great future of the world remain :
Not from barbaric force, but soul and brain
May Christian empire take its destined mould :
Not long descent, but moral power, shall gain
Rank and precedence in the age of gold.
1867.

III. THE COMMONS.

THE COMMONS : with a thrill of conscious pride
We speak that honoured though familiar name,
So dear to freedom, progress, virtue, fame ;
Alike to memory and to hope allied.
Bleak barren hills and feudal strifes supplied
Stern nurture for the Commons' infant strength ;
Perennial bloom and smiling peace at length
Flood their fair manhood with exulting tide.
The Commons' House—the age-long conflict won—
Wields the free Commonwealth's resistless might,
Yet links, with loyal skill, the public right
In grateful fealty to the ancient throne,
Which now no fence of serried steel demands,
Engirt with loving hearts and willing hands.

1867.

Yarrow.

YARROW, the genius of a nameless bard
Has dowered thy stream with sad undying fame ;
One dark ancestral deed of guilt and shame
Yet veils with kindred darkness rock and sward.
Through soft green vales by wild flowers sweetly starred,
Still float sad echoes of that ancient strain,
Still glides the visioned strife o'er hill and plain.
Yet, gentle Yarrow, with most fond regard
Shall memory linger o'er the pleasant hours
Spent in thy sunny holms and quiet bowers ;
With charms yet dearer to the minstrel's shell,
The manse, of bounteous care the graceful scene,
The school, the boat, the pic-nic on the green,
The generous welcome, and the kind farewell.

1865.

St Mary's Churchyard.

UP the green hill through fern and heath we trod,
Till, o'er its brow, by circling summits hid,
Lay hushed and still, the city of the dead.
In silent awe we pressed the sacred sod,
In silent reverence rose from earth to God,
Whose presence hallows still the lonely steep
Where ages worshipped, and where ages sleep.
No earthly sound invades that calm abode
Save the faint murmur of the distant rill,
Or horn of wild-bee o'er the purple hill ;
Nor, gazing round, may pilgrim's eager eye
Find aught to link the scene with living men,
Or break the solitude of heath and fen :
Beneath him are the dead, above the azure sky.

1865.

To the River Forth.***I.**

THE FORTH ! with strange surprise we hear thy name,
And view thine infant waters as they slip
In quiet gladness o'er the grassy lip
Of this sweet mountain lake, whose dearest claim
Is not with matchless beauty to enshrine
In its clear mirror copse, and crag, and knoll,
But to give birth to thee, and bid thee roll,
Eddying and sounding, on thy course divine.
Still as thou flowest, lake, streamlet, river, lend
Their separate floods to thine ; the augmenting tide
Sweeps slowly down till sea with river blend,
And fleets at anchor on thy bosom ride,
And commerce, in her docks and granaries, stores
The sumless treasures of a thousand shores.

1861.

* On being told that the small streamlet issuing from Lochar was the origin of that river.

To the River Forth.

II.

HERE by thy grassy fount, this rustic mill
Tasks half thy tide to turn its simple wheel ;
While, rising from thy lower depths, the peal
Of naval thunder floats o'er vale and hill.*
Methinks, fair stream, thy course from mountain rill
To river, firth, and sea, may fitly type
His course whom genius, urged by dauntless will,
Impels to virtue, clothes with honours ripe.
Obscure in source, like thee, his life-stream still
Draws strength from hidden brook and rushing wave,
Art, science, toil, the deepening channels fill.
And bless the soil these shining waters lave,
Earth's cultured beauty imaged on its breast,
While Heaven's calm sunshine gilds its ocean rest.

1861.

* The allusion is to the Channel fleet, then (1861) lying in Leith Roads.

Dox Populi, Dox Dei.**I.**

VAIN boast : 'tis not from Heaven that voice descends,
Its changeful tones denote unholy birth ;
Full oft its frenzied passions shake the earth,
Full oft to deeds of shame it triumph lends.
TRUTH walks the earth, and loud hosanna rends
With deafening jubilee the o'er-arching sky,
Anon the hills resound with " Crucify,"
And the fair scene in guilt and anguish ends.
For Christian blood the insensate pagans cry,
The Church, victorious, shouts for pagan gore,
'Tis Freedom, now, the impulsive crowds adore,
And now to bonds their willing necks apply.
High o'er that wild and surging crowd must soar
Him who would hear the voice of Deity.

1869.

Dox Populi, Dox Dei.**II.**

YET while loud cries of pain or passion claim
No listener's homage, and no sanction bear,
That common voice which all earth's millions share
May boast diviner source and nobler aim.

'Tis no vain noise when many nations claim
One rule of life, of love one virtuous law ;
When sage and savage, with consenting awe,
Guard home's pure altar from incestuous flame :

'Tis no blind impulse bids the nations see
The stamp of Heaven in earthly beauties rife,
And prompts in all the hopes of future life.

Those common hopes, that impulse clear and broad,
Proclaim in tones divine to earth and sea,

"The people's voice is still the voice of God."

1869.

"The Day is Thine."

(PSALM LXXIV. 16.)

THE day is Thine : night's calm and curtained hour
Thou giv'st to man : with dawn its empire ends ;
From sea and shore, with flush of morn ascends
Life's conscious homage to the All-ruling Power.
Thine is the light which gleams on leaf and flower,
Thine the soft radiance of the azure air,
Thine the rich feast all living creatures share
In field and flood, in dell, and stream, and bower.
The day is Thine : 'tis ours with duteous heed
To mark thy hand its shining gates unclose,
Wake the earth's slumbering myriads from repose,
And touch their transports with its rolling speed ;
And ours 'neath summer suns or wintry snows,
To own Thy sceptre, and Thy will to read.

1870.

"The Night also is Thine."

(PSALM LXXIV. 19.)

THE night is also Thine ; the shades that close
Round closing day proclaim Thy sleepless power,
Flood with soft glory midnight's silent hour,
And fret with gold man's chamber of repose.
How calm and still the moon's pale crescent glows !
Around her throne what countless watch-fires burn !
With reverent eye to heaven's blue arch we turn,
And in its starry depths our vision lose.
These are Thy glorious works : the night is Thine ;
Its circling worlds, its calm and holy light,
Reflect Thine image, with Thy presence shine,
To do Thy bidding speed through depth and height.
'Tis ours to turn, when earthly lights decline,
To far off worlds, still with Thy presence bright.

1870.

In the Old Wood, Dalkeith Park.*

I.

HERE, 'mid these hoary oaks, whose giant girth
A thousand years have rounded, let me rest ;
List the wild music of their wind-swept crest,
And watch the quivering sunbeams strike the earth.
What eye beheld these oaks' primeval birth ?
Borne on the breeze the acorns softly fell ;
Anon the saplings rose on heath and dell ;
Anon the forest rang with sylvan mirth ;
Their ample boughs attract the fowls of air,
To their cool shade the panting herds repair,
While roving clans and vengeful feuds reveal
A race still savage, and a soil still bare ;
Yet, o'er that murky sky begin to steal
A dawning radiance and a softening air.

1872.

* One of the few remaining portions of the natural oak forest which at one time covered a large part of Scotland.

In the Old Wood, Dalkeith Park.

II.

TIME speeds : fresh verdure clothes the ancient wood,

Walled, graced and guarded by baronial power,

Whose frowning keep encircling oaks embower,

Whose armed retainers wait the chieftain's nod :

His home a camp, his midnight march abroad

The dreaded signal of avenging flame,

Yet stirred betimes with patriot's nobler aim,

He bids prelusive harvests crown the sod.

Time speeds : the moral harvest swells apace,

Reluctant nobles sheathe the idle sword,

Enfranchised thralls forsake their feudal lord,

Peace, letters, law diffuse their quiet grace,

And rising arts their generous strength afford,

To nerve for nobler aims a nobler race.

1872.

In the Old Wood, Dalkeith Park.

III.

STILL stand the ancient oaks, defiant, bold,
Scarred, splintered, cleft by storms of countless years,
While clustered thick on waving boughs appears
The ancestral rookery, vocal as of old.
All else is changed : where frowned the Lion's Hold,*
Palatial turrets greet the pilgrim's eye,
And startled deer in playful terror fly
Round peaceful lawns which peaceful streams enfold ;
Types of that power benign whose growing might
Dissolves the feudal chieftain's coarse array,
Gives knowledge, truth and toil imperial sway,
Asserts for peer and peasant equal right,
Dowers with exhaustless gifts our happier day,
And sheds on Scottish shores a holier light.

1872.

* Lion's Hold, or Lion's Den, the name given to the old castle of Dalkeith when occupied by the Earl of Morton.

Sir James V. Simpson, Baronet.

BORN, JANUARY 7, 1811 ; DIED, MAY 6, 1870.

SIMPSON,—thy native isle, the peopled earth,
Will mourn the stroke which stills thy noble heart ;
Pilgrims unborn shall quit the crowded mart
To bless the cot which claims thy honoured birth.
In royal halls, by labour's lowly hearth,
Pain at thy bidding smooths his ruffled brow ;
The primal sorrow ends ; with shining prow
Life's tiny bark is launched 'mid spousal mirth
And household benediction. Even 'mid war,
And storm, and accident, thy genius dwells ;
Thy balm Lethean every torture quells,
Nor grief nor guilt the gracious triumphs mar ;
Nor shall these triumphs cease ; each heart that swells
For human weal shall speed thy shining car.

1870.

E n o c h.

“ And Enoch walked with God.”—GENESIS v. 22.

WHAT meaneth this ? Did God his glory hide
In form of man, and arm in arm abroad
Lead forth His saint as friend, companion, guide ?
Was't thus attended Enoch walked with God ?
By faith, not sight, he kept the narrow road,
By faith, not feeling, leant on strength unseen,
Faith lit the joy which in his bosom glowed,
Faith breathed the peace in which he dwelt serene :
In lowly trust by stream and valley green
His prayer ascended still, his victim bled,
For so, in figure, from the first was shed
The blood which expiates sin : the cloudy scene
Grew bright while Enoch gazed ;—faith changed to sight,
And God His servant took to walk in Heaven's own light.

1850.

What art thou, Earth ?

WHAT art thou, Earth, with all thy fair array
Of mountain, meadow, ocean, wood, and stream,
But one vast sepulchre whose dark decay
Is vainly shaded by the vernal gleam
Which gilds thy brow with beauty ? Yes ; the dust
Of ages slumbers in thy cold embrace,
And o'er the perished glories of our race
Thy laurels wave in mockery keen and just.
Yet boast not, spoiler, for thy sleepers must
Awake to spurn thy sin-created power,
Thy deepest cells shall own the joyous hour,
Thine ocean caverns yield their mighty trust.
This pleasing hope my anxious eyes shall close,
And smooth the pillow of my last repose.

1827.

G

The Shortest Day.

THE inverted year its midnight goal has won,
To which through deepening shades the past has bent,
From which shall spring the future's fair ascent,
Its brightening verdure, its refulgent sun.
Obscured by darkling skies and vapours dun,
Gleams faint and far the enfeebled lord of day,
Yet unsubdued he holds his onward way,
Rejoicing still his glorious race to run.
Mark the life-lesson : Wake from wintry sleep,
With firmer step truth's upward path pursue,
With ampler knowledge heart and soul imbue,
Thy trust more loving, and thy faith more deep ;
So shall thy youth preserve its vernal hue,
Thy ripening years autumnal treasures reap.

1872.

Life in Death.

MAN dies but mankind lives ; from year to year
Earth's human stars go down the darkening sky,
But younger orbs the stellar voids supply,
And fill with kindred light the unchanging sphere.
Man dies but Nature lives ; from wintry bier
She wakes with quickening pulse and kindling eye,
Buds slowly burst, soft vernal breezes sigh,
And drip of summer rain salutes the ear.
How the leaves rustle 'neath the gracious shower !
How the birds carol in the leafy grove !
Far spreads o'er earth and sea the glowing hour,
Through azure depths what insect armies rove !
The great Provider still on stream and bower
Pours life and gladness from His fount of love.

1873.

Chislehurst.*

I.

TREAD softly ; muffled step and glistening eye
 Befit the bier where fallen empire sleeps,
 Where widowed queen unslumbering vigil keeps,
And orphaned prince and weeping peers are by.
To this soft English vale retired to die
 The man who power's sublimest peak had scaled,
 Beneath whose frown earth's bravest warriors quailed,
Yet doomed disaster's lowest depths to try.
Not in the shock of war the arrow sped,
 No lurking traitor dealt the coward blow ;
As peasant sinks, so sank the royal head,
 'Mid pain borne bravely and unuttered woe ;
While France, afar, did kindred sorrows shed
 For bleeding empire and remorseless foe.

* The ex-Emperor, Napoleon III., died at Chislehurst, on the 9th January 1873, and was buried there on the 15th.

Chislehurst.

II.

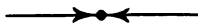
STRANGE destiny ; from dungeon to the throne,
From rayless gloom to light of cloudless day,
From scorn and weakness to imperial sway,
And thence in hopeless exile doomed to groan.
Round the sad bier not kinsmen bend alone,
Methinks, unseen the pride, ambition, power
Of prostrate France attend the mortal hour,
And make the mournful obsequies their own.
Of that still chamber speak no jarring word,
The empire of the silent land be peace ;
Reserve for history Time's supreme award,
And, life's fierce fever o'er, let faction cease.
Be ours the joy that still when fortune frowned,
The wanderer sought a home on English ground.

1873.

MISCELLANEOUS.



MISCELLANEOUS



Bannockburn.

AND this is Bannock, down whose side
Fair Autumn pours her golden tide !
The reapers ply their ardent toil,
And store in peace the precious spoil ;
While, rising from the gentle rill,
A thriving village clothes the hill,
Whence, as we pause, in cheerful hum
The sounds of toil and pleasure come,
From buoyant youth, from sober age,

From maiden fair and matron sage,
All mindless that the turf they tread
Blooms o'er the ashes of the dead,
That where *they* ply the busy loom
Their fathers found a glorious tomb,
And Scotland's blood-bought freedom rose
From the loved vale where Bannock flows.

Yes, gazing here we fondly turn
To that bright page of Scottish story
That links for aye with Bannockburn
The memory of her ancient glory.
Here still we view the earth-fast rock
Which Bruce to fix his standard chose,
Round which, in fierce protracted shock,
The eddyng conflict sunk and rose,
Till England quailed, and Edward proved
How weak are numbers, valour, birth,
Opposed to patriot Scotsmen, moved
To strike for country, home, and hearth.

Those times are gone : five hundred years
Have swept that scene of blood and tears ;
Southron and Scot, no longer foes,
Have blent the thistle with the rose,
And on the fields of ancient strife
Mixed in the toils of peaceful life.
Yet, gentle stream, the spirit lives
Which to thy name its lustre gives ;
And should an envious foe profane
 The humble turf which crowns thy shore,
Thy patriot sons would rise again,
 Strong as their sires in days of yore ;
And nerved by freedom, virtue, right,
 Rush to the field, nor thence return,
Till, victors in the glorious fight,
 They stood once more on Bannockburn.

1840.

Robert Burns.

Written in 1859, on the Centenary of the Poet's Birth.

**A HUNDRED years this morn have sped
Since Scotia's poet first drew breath,
An humble straw-thatched roof o'erhead,
A straw-wrought couch beneath.
Around his lowly cot, the strife
Of wintry winds was fiercely driven,
And thus the stormy boon of life
To Coila's bard was given.**

**Unconscious slept the mystic flame,
Through boyhood's brief and busy hour,
Till kindling eye and throbbing frame
Revealed its quenchless power.**

With quivering hand he seized the lyre,
 And music burst from every string,
 The listeners felt the sacred fire,
 And blessed their minstrel king.

Wit, wisdom, genius, passions strong,
 An eagle's glance, a giant's power,
 Deep love of right, deep scorn of wrong
 Were Burns' immortal dower.

To humble worth his generous hand
 Was ready still to soothe and cheer ;
 In vain might pampered wealth demand
 His faintest smile or tear.

He sang of love, with truth so rare,
 In strains so passionate and strong,
 That love can never cease to wear
 Her minstrel's robe of song.
 The humble moss, the wood, the hill,
 Touched by his genius, flushed and glowed,
 And gushing stream and gurgling rill
 In softer music flowed.

And, ages hence, the murmured bliss
Shall float o'er Coila's loved domain,
And Ayr his "pebbled shore" shall kiss,
In memory of the strain.
For 'tis not landscape, dark or bright,
That wakes in bards the fire divine ;
Their genins sheds the living light
In which earth's beauties shine.

1859.



Ben Ledi.

BEN LEDI, mount of God,* majestic, lone,
 Bathed in the brightness of these summer skies !
 Here where thy summits skirt the heavenly throne,
 We hear the voice which bids our hearts arise
 To Him who called thee from the molten deep,
 And bade thy dome its granite arches keep.

Each rock, each pathway throbs with life and love,
 Each tinkling rill is bright with fern and flower,
 From heath to heath the humming wild-bees rove,
 Gay insect-myriads sport their joyous hour,
 Love's pleasing glow the pensive curlew feels,
 And round each shining cliff the swallow wheels.

* So called from having been in old times a place of Pagan worship.

Viewed from this Alphine watch-tower, what a scene
Of pomp and glory lies outspread below !
What rugged mountains, valleys fair and green,
What woods, what waters in the sunshine glow !
O'er the vast scene of grandeur and renown
The arch of smiling heaven sinks softly down.

Long may it bless and shield thee, Scotland dear,
My native land, my home in youth and age,
Which patriots reverence, and oppressors fear ;
To bear thy name is noble heritage.
What fame thy hardy sons have won for thee,
Renown by land, and empire on the sea !

Within yon shaggy dells our dauntless sires
Nursed the proud freedom of their mountain home ;
Undimmed by age still glow the martial fires
Which scared the eagles of imperial Rome ;
These beauteous solitudes of lake and scaur
Ne'er wept the ravage of invading war.

Yet 'mid these classic haunts, nor glen nor grove
 But tells where valour sleeps, or beauty shone,
 Where native minstrel strung the harp to love,
 Or chieftains bled to save a sinking throne :
 Their quenchless faith our love and pity claim,
 We mourn their weakness but enjoy their fame.

Mark where these hills recede, Teith's infant stream
 Pours its swift waters from the impetuous north,
 Huts, hamlets, corn-fields, kindling in its gleam,
 Then slowly mingling with the distant Forth :
 Far to the west, by capes and headlands curled,
 Clyde pours his mighty commerce round the world.

Descend we now : this mountain breeze may bring
 Fresh vigour to our arms for future toil ;
 This fond attempt our country's praise to sing,
 Knit us more closely to her cherished soil ;
 But 'tis in lowlier paths and busier life,
 That duty calls us to her needful strife.

1861.

H

Roslin.

SWIFT by its sylvan charms and storied lore,
On Roslin's classic soil we softly tread,
Where, shrined in beauty, by Esk's rocky shore,
Rise the grey relics of the mighty dead.

With conscious awe we view these crumbling towers,
The feudal stronghold, and the Christian fane,
Whence steel-clad warriors led their vassal powers,
Where lettered churchmen held their gentler reign.

What pomp barbaric filled those ancient halls !
What valour guarded them ! what beauty graced !
Yet 'mid their buried spoils no gem recalls
The life which breathes in letters, science, taste.

These in cathedral shade meet shelter found,
 Fit soil to nourish, willing hands to dress ;
 The life plants thrive apace, and far around
 Shed their soft odours on the wilderness.

By quiet watchers in these calm retreats
 The torch of ancient lore was fanned and fed ;
 Of modern culture there the earliest sweets
 In fragrant promise on the earth were shed.

The lettered wisdom of the world of old
 Had perished in the gloom of Gothic might ;
 All honour to the Church, the treasured gold
 Still dowers with priceless wealth an age of light.

No more in abbey rich, or cloistered cell,
 May studious monk o'er wasted vellum pore,
 But nobler aims to nobler search impel
 Throughout truth's widening realm by sea and shore.

Yet long to mouldering aisle and ruined tower,
With pensive step shall pious pilgrims stray,
Mark the rude relics of forgotten power,
And muse on creeds and conflicts passed away.

Flow on, fair stream, be still thy rocky dell
The haunt of sportive youth, and pilgrim sage,
While clustering woods and deepening verdure swell
Along thy beauteous shores from age to age.

1862.



Brotherhood.

"AM I my brother's keeper?" Yes,
Your fates are linked in bane and bliss,
Thy life is thine to shelter his.

In proud seclusion from thy kind
No rest thine aching heart shall find,
No outward calm, no peace of mind.

Be thine the joy, with spirit meek,
To wipe from tears thy brother's cheek,
And in his smile thy guerdon seek.

"Where is thy brother?" Mark that lane,
Its darkness, squalor, misery, pain,
Where hope is quenched and effort vain.

Go help him : bid heaven's light and air
Sweep those grim chambers of despair,
And bless thy brother prostrate there.

Snatch him from depths of social mire,
Relume his spirit's wasted fire,
And upward bid the flame aspire.

Help him to climb that moral steep
Whence the purged eye may calmly sweep
The circuit of the social deep ;

And mark how o'er its living tide
Where thronging navies heedless ride,
An arm unseen their paths shall guide.

Help him that loving hand to trace
Which knits all ranks in close embrace,
Binds man to man, and race to race.

Nor from thy brother's quest conceal
The balm which bleeding hearts may heal,
The light which other worlds reveal.

The hopes that hallow earth and time,
The life which, drawn from happier clime,
Gives want and weakness strength sublime.

Thus calm the sufferer's deep turmoil,
Renew his arm for future toil,
And on his wounds pour wine and oil.

So rescued shall thy brother stand,
With manly brow, and honest hand,
To grace and guard his native land.

1864.



"Consider the Lilies."

MARK VI. 28.

'Tis Reason's voice ; to man alone
Of all earth's tribes the power is given
Through Nature's wide domain to own
The skill and care of Heaven.

Assert thy birthright ; learn to rise
O'er the mute tenants of the sod,
And mark in earth and air and skies
The signature of God.

Observe the lilies ; lowly, meek,
Yet bright with more than regal bloom,
Their peerless hue His pencil speak,
His breath their rich perfume.

No human hand by stream or wood
May shield the lily's fragile form,
Yet power Divine shall guard the bud
In sunshine and in storm.

Unfold its charms with opening day,
Breathe its soft balm on midnight air,
Nor let its slenderest leaf decay
Without celestial care.

And since life's lowest links depend
On the great Father's arm above,
How calmly may his children bend
Before the throne of love !

1864.



"The Earth is the Lord's."

PSALM XXIV. 1.

EARTH, Lord, is *Thine* : at thy behest
Rose the fair orb from ancient night,
Flushed the first tide its foamy crest,
And throbbed the air with life and light.

The earth is *Thine* ; Thy image glows
Undimmed on mount, and stream, and sea ;
'Neath tropic suns, 'mid polar snows
Life's countless millions turn to thee.

The earth is *Thine* ; the fold, the field,
To occupy, not own, are given,
The sad to cheer, the weak to shield,
And touch earth's gloom with hues of heaven.

The earth is *Thine* ; enthralled by sin
It yearns to break the yoke unblest,
Man's long-lost Paradise to win,
And 'neath thy rightful sceptre rest.

The earth is *Thine* ; resume the throne,
Bid wars be hushed, and sorrows cease,
And let the ransomed nations own
The King of Kings, and Prince of Peace.

1864.



Mont Blanc.

At the entrance to the Vale of Chamouni, where the magnificent range of snowy summits comes first into view, a wayside cross has been erected, standing beside which the following thoughts were suggested.

NEEDS not the symbol of immortal love

To consecrate and guard this vale profound,
Down whose far depths of glacier, glen, and grove,
Each step by tourist trod is holy ground.

Unsandalled, silent, let the pilgrim turn

To where, 'mid cloudless blue, yon summits sleep,
Mark how their snowy crests in sunset burn,
And own His power who called them from the deep.

Yet, 'mid these marvels of creative might

'Tis well this symbol's living voice to hear,
Shedding o'er icy flood and Alpine height
The blest effulgence of a holier sphere.

1866.

Carsaig.

Written in a Lady's Album there.

ENGIRT by mountains, down whose wooded walls,
Through foam and foliage, sweeps the fierce cascade,
Fair Carsaig stands : the ocean swells and falls
In murmuring music round her sylvan glade.

Dear were those hours, remote from public strife,
'Mid Carsaig's leafy dells and summits hoar ;
And dear those mystic forms of ancient life
By fair hands gathered from primeval shore.

The stormy grandeur of Mull's wave-worn coast ;
Her granite cliffs, her ocean's ceaseless roll,
And terraced hills, with crests in vapour lost,
Stamp their stern image on the tourist's soul

With these my willing heart shall softly blend
Kind thoughts of Carsaig and its courteous cheer ;
'That cherished name shall mellowing lustre lend
To all those western isles for many a year.

1867.



Another Year.

ANOTHER year : how stands the sun ?

What image bears the rising hour ?

What recent gains has Freedom won ?

What further conquests wait her power ?

Unhasting, calm, the day-star sweeps

Round the great arc of cosmic change,

Though Gaul is crushed and Roma weeps,

And Erin's voice is sad and strange.

Yet Freedom lives, her empire grows ;

To Spring earth's age-long winter yields ;

And broadening brightening realms disclose

The promise of autumnal fields.

Dear native isle, where Freedom first
Found shelter in a world of wrong,
Be still, by her clear spirit nursed,
The home of freedom, genius, song ;

Where art adorns the smiling land,
And commerce fills the crowded mart ;
Where science guides the busy hand,
And duty rules the patriot heart.

1868.



The Two Voices.

A VOICE spoke thus in friendly tone,
"This civic strife has painful grown,
Were it not better let alone?"

I answered, "No : in Freedom's cause
Reproach is fame, and scorn applause,
'Twere craven weakness even to pause."

Rejoined the Voice, "This burning zeal
May mar, not mend the commonweal,
And spread the wounds it seeks to heal.

Think'st thou Sadowa's fatal plain
Red with fierce conflict's iron rain,
Will e'er its wonted hue regain?

Or, should kind Nature's pitying skill
Salve those deep scars of outward ill,
What power the moral chasm shall fill ? ”

I said, “ We wield not sword or spear,
With arms unsoiled by blood or tear
We strike for rights to freedom dear.

For right in civic life to share,
To nurse its spirit, breathe its air,
Its tasks fulfil, its burdens bear.”

To which the Voice : “ Permit the thought,
Such boon may be too dearly bought,
Give social quiet—power is nought.

He wisely acts whose tastes recoil
From public cares and civil broil,
Whose simple sphere is daily toil.”

I said, " Mere toil befits the slave ;
O'er us no servile banners wave ;
Freeborn, our heritage we crave.

True life expires in vassal gloom ;
Give public virtue leave to bloom,
An open sky, and ample room.

Mark the young oak : in hothouse dry,
Unstirred by breeze of sea or sky,
The noble plant will droop and die.

But plant the sapling on the rock,
Expose it to the tempest's shock,
Its giant strength the storm shall mock.

'Tis so with man : no skill may charm
To manly strength the idle arm,
Or fettered soul with virtue warm.

But freedom given, the generous dower
Will lend his arm heroic power
And o'er the land new treasures shower."

The answer came, "Ancestral choice
Is worthy ours ; I shrink from noise ;
The *Trust* shall have my heart and voice.

Its ample shades our sires enjoyed,
Its grateful calm no strife alloyed,
Make not the ancient shelter void."

I said, "Our fathers, brave and leal,
Regardful of the public weal,
Claimed power to tax their daily meal.

Claimed power for social health to pay ;
Disdained for pauper's dole to pray,
Or grope through gloom their miry way.

Up, recreant sons of honoured sires,
Ere manhood's waning spark expires,
Relume, though late, the ancient fires."

"Yet," said the Voice, "our sires ne'er sought
The powers for which their sons have fought,
They claimed to pay, but not to vote."

I answered, "True, but social night
Then veiled the sky; morn's rising might
Now bathes the land in living light."

The Voice : "Dalkeith may boast to share
Her noble chieftain's generous care,
To own his gifts, his livery wear."

I said, "A ducal crown may grace
The social fabric's highest place,
The people form the solid base.

Our sires of old, 'mid blood and brawl,
Sought safety 'neath the castle wall—
Imperial law now shelters all.

Not clansman's spear, but that dread sword
Now drawn 'gainst Ethiop's dusky lord*
May peace to loyal hearths afford.

The patriot chief, where Freedom reigns,
Will prize and spread her glorious gains,
Not wreathe anew the feudal chains ;

Will cheer the workman's honest care,
Respect his rights, his troubles share,
And bid his home new lustre wear."

1868.

* The Abyssinian War was then going on.

Christmas Carol.

BRING holly bough and oaken wreath,
O'er-arch with green our Christmas hearth,
A holier, kindlier spirit breathe
On festal rites of pagan birth.

Recall those midnight strains which fell
So strangely sweet on shepherds' ears,
When angel harps, o'er cliff and dell,
Woke the clear notes of happier spheres.

Let echoes of that earlier song
Blend with our carol's lively grace,
When friends much loved and sundered long,
Around the Christmas hearth embrace.

Dear hearth, how bright thy fagots blaze,
When child and sire around thee press !
When youth its heart-warm homage pays,
And grateful age survives to bless !

Sweet memories of that gracious scene
Will soothe sad hours of worldly strife ;
These Christmas wreaths in fadeless green
Will bloom in loving hearts through life.

And while kind hearts with love o'erflow,
Give the warm current ample scope ;
On lowly hearths some meed bestow,
In lowly ears breathe love and hope.

For in that carol heard of yore
Nor wealth nor want might vantage seek ;
Its strains brought grace to rich and poor,
To bond and free, to Jew and Greek.

Nor let thy love exhaust its care
On human woes ; the crib, the stall,
Supply mute sufferers—let them share
The rest, the joy designed for all.

1868.



Past and Present.

Lines supposed to be written by a native of Dalkeith, on returning, after a long absence, to the scenes of his childhood.

'Tis fifty years since, young and gay,
I sought a home 'neath western skies,
Now bent with years, infirm and grey,
My native Esk before me lies.

Full oft on distant shores, dear stream,
Thy murmurs swelled in memory's ear,
Full oft thy well-remembered gleam
To exile's heart brought hope and cheer.

And still, though dimmed with traffic's soil,
Thy waves in murmuring music flow ;
Calm as of yore thine eddies boil,
Bright as of yore thy margins glow.

Again I tread the wooded dell,
Again the bristling copse explore,
Till scenes of childhood's sport that tell
Transform me to a child once more.

Emerging from the pebbled strand,
Familiar scenes around me rise,
I greet the dear familiar land,
The ancient hills, the ancient skies.

Still Dalkeith crowns the rocky crest
Which circling sister streams enclose ;
Still o'er her streets from east to west
The tide of life and commerce flows.

All else is changed : I ask in vain
For men whose name in boyhood's day
Were household words ; the honoured train
Of early chiefs has passed away.

Gray, Wardlaw, Elliot, Otto, White,
Trod in those years the busy stage,
Trained their strong arms to tasks of might,
And still inspire this younger age.

New pastors now the pulpits own,
New teachers in the schools I meet,
Through unknown crowds I walk alone
A stranger on my native street.

Yet not in vain the years have flown,
Advance has still come linked with change,
Of truth and toil the fruits have grown
To nobler form, of ampler range.

In the great gifts by science won
My natal town has largely shared,
In the great race by freemen run
Her patriot sons have greatly dared.

In every street taste, culture, art,
 Proclaim and guide augmenting wealth,
And workmen's home and traffic's mart
 Wear the fresh bloom of moral health.

One blot remains ; an ancient Board
 Thrusts its dead form 'mong living powers,
And strives, 'mid public scorn, to guard
 The sway of long-forgotten hours.

But all in vain ; the shrunken skin
 Bursts with the newer, nobler wine ;
Despised without, enslaved within,
 The Board's one duty is—resign.

1869.



Once more unto the Breach.

ONCE more unto the breach ; the crumbling tower
Waits but the sweep of Freedom's peaceful shower,
One volley more the tottering pile shall thrust,
With all its shams and snobbery, in the dust.

Rise, men of Dalkeith ! vindicate your claim
To speak the tongue your sires have raised to fame :
To wield the power they held in grateful trust ;
And tread the soil where sleeps their honoured dust.

Throughout broad Scotland—mountain, moss, and dell
Mark where, for truth and right, her martyrs fell :
Where native ranks invading hosts withstood,
And for their country poured heroic blood.

With arms less sanguine, but with hopes as bright,
Go, wage your glorious war for civil right,
To wrest from ancient power a baseless claim,
And bid enfranchised men their rulers name.

What dignifies a town ? Not ancient date,
Not spires or towers, not rank or regal state,
Not lordly halls where wealth and fashion glide,
“ And low-browed baseness wafts perfume to pride ;”

But MEN—high-minded, thoughtful, modest, free—
Who shrink no duty, bow no servile knee,
Claim their just rights, their equal burdens bear,
And on their honest brows the stamp of manhood wear.

1869.



"My soul thirsteth for God."

PSALM XLII.

I THIRST for God : night's starry train,
Earth's teeming life, the rolling year,
Veil the all-ruling arm ; I hear
His footsteps in the viewless sphere,
But yearn to pierce its depths in vain.

I thirst for God : no earthly flood
May quench the spirit's deep desires ;
To heights unseen the soul aspires,
From fitful gleam of mortal fires
It turns with eager gaze to God.

But turns in vain : earth yields no balm
To hearts which sin and sorrow doom,
No light to gild the moral gloom,
No guide to worlds beyond the tomb,
On life's last tides no bird of calm.

Then hail, 'mid cisterns soiled and riven,
The streams from Siloa's fount which flow,
And hail that holy light whose glow
Brings rest to doubt, and balm to woe,
Links man to God, and earth to heaven.

1869.



What will the Year bring ?

“The thing that hath been is that which shall be.”—ECCLESIASTES.

WHAT will the year bring ? cloud and sun,
The vernal bud, the Summer bloom,
Autumnal wealth by labour won,
And Winter's deepening gloom.

Child of the past, its form shall wear
Lines graven deep by furrowing years,
Sire of the future, onward bear
Far-gathered joys and tears.

Fair hues may gild the early morn,
But clouds will gather after rain,
And darkened hearths and bosoms torn
The virgin lustre stain.

On infant eyes earth's light shall dawn
Sweet as on Nature's primal day ;
Free as of old, by stream and lawn
Shall merry children play.

A graver step and loftier brow
Shall mark where boyhood blends with youth,
And duty points with daring prow,
To peril, power, or truth.

And softer light from answering eyes
Again shall fan the mutual flame,
Flush with strange radiance earth and skies,
And gild the path to fame.

Again shall wake Art's giant powers,
The grind and strain of bolt and crank,
Where strength allied with science showers
Life treasures rank on rank.

Again in realms of silent thought
Shall truth and toil new triumphs gain,
And empire's widening sphere be sought
In depths of soul and brain.

The dawning now, the storied past,
Have common lineage, common doom ;
Their summer calm, their wintry blast,
One birth, career, and tomb.

1872.



